

Gospel of the Hebrews

The Gospel of the Hebrews is known from quotations by Cyril of Jerusalem (*Discourse on Mary Theotokos* 12a), Origen (*Commentary on John* 2.12.87), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 2.9.45.5, 5.14.96.3), and Jerome (*Commentary on Isaiah* 4, *Commentary on Ephesians* 3, *Commentary on Ezekiel* 6, *De viris illustribus* 2). These are the only passages that are quoted in Cameron's *The Other Gospels*, pp. 85-86, which follows the translation made by Philipp Vielhauer and George Ogg in *New Testament Apocrypha*.

The following selection is excerpted from Montague Rhode James in *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1924), pp. 1-8. There are two things to be noted. First, Cameron believes that the Gospel of the Hebrews may have been independent from the canonical gospels. Thus, most of the references adduced by M.R. James, aside from the ones mentioned above, would be assigned by Cameron to another Jewish-Christian Gospel, most likely the Gospel of the Nazoreans. Second, the "Oxyrhynchus Sayings" are now known to come from the Gospel of Thomas.

The Gospel According to the Hebrews

This is on a different level from all the other books we have to deal with. It was a divergent yet not heretical form of our Gospel according to St. Matthew. Even to sketch the controversies which have raged about it is impracticable here. What may be regarded as established is that it existed in either Hebrew or Aramaic, and was used by a Jewish Christian sect who were known as Nazaraeans (Nazarenes), and that it resembled our *Matthew* closely enough to have been regarded as the original Hebrew of that Gospel. I believe few, if any, would now contend that it *was* that original. It is generally, and I believe rightly, looked upon as a secondary document. What was the extent of the additions to or omissions from *Matthew* we do not know: but two considerations must be mentioned bearing on this: (1) The Stichometry of Nicephorus assigns it 2,200 lines, 300 less than *Matthew*. This figure, if correct, means that a good deal was left out. (2) If the Oxyrhynchus Sayings (see *post*) are really, as competent scholars think, extracts from it, we must suppose a large quantity of additional matter: for we have but two rather brief fragments of that collection of sayings, and eight out of thirteen sayings are either not represented in the canonical text, or differ widely therefrom.

Jerome, who is our chief source of knowledge about this Gospel, says that he had made a Greek and a Latin version of it. The statement is wholly rejected by some, and by others thought to be an exaggeration. It is very difficult to accept it as it stands. Perhaps, as Lagrange suggests, the truth may be that Jerome took notes of the text in Greek and Latin. Schmidtke, it should be added, has tried to show that all Jerome's quotations are borrowed from an earlier writer, Apollonaris; but there is no positive evidence for this.

If the Oxyrhynchus Sayings do come from *Hebrews*, they seem to imply the existence of a Greek version before Jerome's time. This is also implied by the entry in the Stichometry.

I will translate the fragments as they appear in the most recent study on the subject, that of the Rev. Pere Lagrange in the *Revue Biblique*, 1922.

He begins by giving the fragments quoted by Epiphanius from what is properly called the Gospel of the Ebionites. Then he gives those of our Gospel, arranging them in the chronological order of the writers and the works in which they are found. This entails some little repetition, but is otherwise historically interesting, and sound.

Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, i.26.2. But the *Ebionites* use only that Gospel which is according to Matthew, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, calling him an apostate from the Law.

iii.11.7. For the Ebionites, who use only that Gospel which is according to Matthew, are convicted out of that very book as not holding right views about the Lord.

The Ebionites mentioned here are a more primitive sect than those of whom Epiphanius speaks. See below.

Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* i. 9. 45). Even (*or* also, in the Gospel according to the Hebrews is written *the saying*, 'he that wondereth shall reign, and he that reigneth shall rest'.

id. (*Strom.*) v.14.96. For those words have the same force as these: He shall not cease from seeking until he find, and having found, he will be amazed, and having been amazed will reign, and having reigned will rest.

This is identical with one of the Sayings from Oxyrhynchus: see below.

Origen *on John*, ii. 12. And if any accept the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Saviour himself saith, 'Even now did my mother the Holy Spirit take me by one of mine hairs, and carried me away unto the great mountain Thabor', he will be perplexed, &c. . . .

On Jeremiah, homily xv.4. And if anyone receive that *saying*, 'Even now my mother the Holy Spirit took me and carried me up unto the great mountain Thabor', and the rest. . . .

The description of the Holy Spirit as 'my mother' is due to the fact that the Hebrew word for spirit is of the feminine gender. The saying, it is generally thought, refers to the Temptation.

Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* iii.39.17, speaking of the early writer Papias, says: He has also set forth (*or* expounded) another story, about a woman accused of many sins before the Lord, which the Gospel according to the Hebrews also contains.

It is the obvious, and general, view that this story was that of the woman taken in adultery, which, as is well known, forms no part of the true text of St. John's Gospel, though it is inserted by most manuscripts at the beginning of the eighth chapter. A few manuscripts place it in St. Luke's Gospel. The description suggests that Papias's story, with its mention of *many* sins, differed from ours in detail.

id. iv.22.8. Hegesippus made use in his *Memoirs* of the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

id. iii.25.5 (in his list of *antilegomena*, writings whose canonicity was disputed): And among them some have placed the Gospel according to the Hebrews which is the especial delight of those of the Hebrews who have accepted Christ.

iii.27.4. (The Ebionites repudiated Paul) and used only the Gospel according to the Hebrews, making but slight account of the others.

Theophany, iv.12 (preserved in Syriac). As we have found somewhere in the Gospel which the Jews have in the Hebrew tongue, where it is said: I choose for myself them that are good (*or* well pleasing): the good are they whome my Father which in heaven giveth (*or* hath given) me.

ibid. (A passage preserved in Greek also.) But since the Gospel written in Hebrew characters which has reached our hands turns the threat not against the man who hid *the talent*, but against him who had lived riotously (for it told of three servants, one who deserved his master's substance with harlots and flute-girls, another who multiplied it by trading, and another who hid the talent; and made the one to be accepted, another only rebuked, and another to be shut up in prison), the question occurs to me whether in Matthew, after the conclusion of the speech against the man who did nothing, the threat that follows may refer, not to him, but by *epanalepsis* (i.e. taking up a former subject again) be said of the first, who ate and drank with the drunken.

Epiphanius, *Heresy* xxix.9.4 (Nazoraeans). They have the Gospel according to Matthew quite complete, in Hebrew: for this *Gospel* is certainly still preserved among them as it was first written in Hebrew letters. I do not know if they have even removed the genealogy from Abraham to Christ.

Their Gospel was 'quite complete' as distinguished from the Ebionite-Gospel, which was mutilated.

Stichometry of Nicephorus (of uncertain date, but much older than the ninth-century chronicle to which it is attached).

Antilegomena of the New Testament:

Apocalypse of John, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, and Gospel according to the Hebrews, 2,200 lines (300 lines less than the canonical Matthew).

Jerome. He is our principal authority in this matter.

On Ephesians, v. 4. As also we read in the Hebrew Gospel: 'And never, saith he, by ye joyful, save when ye behold your brother with love.'

On Micah vii.6. (The quotation about the Holy Spirit given above under Origen. Jerome quotes it again several times, not always in full.

Of illustrious men, 2 (on James the Lord's brother).

Also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, lately translated by me into Greek and Latin speech, which Origen often uses, tells, after the resurrection of the Saviour: 'Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared to him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep)', and again after a little, 'Bring ye, saith the Lord, a table and bread', and immediately it is added, 'He took bread and blessed and brake and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him: My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep'.

This is a famous passage. One interesting clause is apt to escape notice, about the giving of the shroud to the servant of the (high) priest, which implies that priests must have been apprised of the resurrection as soon as the apostles. Was the servant of the priest Malchus? Presumably the servant was at the sepulchre: if so, it was being guarded by the Jews as well as the Roman soldiers (as in the Gospel of Peter).

ibid. 3. Further, the Hebrew itself (*or* original) is preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea which was collected with such care by the martyr Pamphilus. I also had an opportunity of copying it afforded me by the Nazarenes who use the book, at Beroea, a city of Syria.

This Beroea is Aleppo. In later years Jerome ceased to regard the Hebrew Gospel as the original Matthew.

ibid. 16. Of the Epistle of Ignatius 'to Polycarp' (*really* to Smyrna). In it he also inserts a testimony about the person of Christ, from the Gospel which was lately translated by me; his words are: But I both saw him (*this is wrongly quoted*) in the flesh after the resurrection, and believe that he is *in the flesh*: and when he came to Peter and those who were with Peter, he said to them: Lo, feel me and see that I am not a bodiless spirit (demon). And forthwith they touched him and believed.

Ignatius, to the Smyrnaeans, iii., 1, really says: For I know, and I believe that he is in the flesh even after his resurrection.

Another citation of these words of Christ is given by Origen as from the Doctrine of Peter: see p. 18.

On Matt. ii. Bethlehem of Judaea. This is a mistake of the scribes: for I think it was originally expressed by the Evangelist as we read in the Hebrew, 'of Judah', not Judaea.

On Matt vi.11 (the Lord's Prayer).

In the Gospel according to the Hebrews for 'super-substantial' bread I found *mahar*, which means 'of the morrow', so that the sense is: Our bread of the morrow, that is, of the future, give us this day.

The word supersubstantial is meant to render literally the difficult word *epiousios* which we translate 'daily'.

On Ps. cxxxv. In the Hebrew Gospel according to Matthew it is thus: Our bread of the morrow give us this day; that is, 'the bread which thou wilt give us in thy kingdom, give us this day'.

On Matt. xii. 13. In the Gospel which the Nazarenes and Ebionites use (which I have lately translated into Greek from the Hebrew, and which is called by many (*or* most) people the original of Matthew),

this man who had the withered hand is described as a mason, who prays for help in such words as this: 'I was a mason seeking a livelihood with my hands: I pray thee, Jesus, to restore me mine health, that I may not beg meanly for my food.'

The mention of the Ebionites here is gratuitous. Jerome nowhere speaks of them as using the Gospel, and everything goes to show that, in his time, they did not.

Letter to Damascus (20) on Matt. xxi. 9. Matthew, who wrote his gospel in the Hebrew speech, put it thus: Osanna barrama, i.e., Osanna in the highest.

On Matt. xxiii. 35. In the Gospel which the Nazarenes use, for 'son of Barachias' I find 'of Joiada' written.

This reading avoids an historical difficulty, and is doubtless secondary.

On Matt. xxvii. 16. This *Barabbas*, in the Gospel entitled (written) according to the Hebrews, is interpreted 'son of their master' (teacher).

By 'interpreted, says Lagrange, it is not meant that the Gospel translated the name, but that it used a form of it which suggested the meaning - Bar-abban.

On Matt. xxvii.51. In the Gospel I so often mention we read that a lintel of the temple of immense size was broken and divided.

Letter to Hedibia (ep. 120) 8. But in the Gospel that is written in Hebrew letters we read, not that the veil of the temple was rent, but that the lintel of the temple of wondrous size fell.

This was probably a change made under the influence of Isa. vi. 4, 'the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried'.

On Isa. xi.2. (The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him) not partially as in the case of other holy men: but, according to the Gospel written in the Hebrew speech, which the Nazarenes read, 'There shall descend upon him the whole fount of the Holy Spirit'. . . In the Gospel I mentioned above, I find this written: And it came to pass when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said unto him: My son, in all the prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldst come, and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, and thou art my first begotten son, that reignest for ever.

On Isa. xi. 9, My mother the Holy Spirit.

On Isa., preface to bk. xviii. For when the Apostles thought him to be a spirit, or, in the words of the Gospel which is of the Hebrews, which the Nazarenes are wont to read, 'a bodiless demon', he said to them (Luke xxiv. 38).

On Ezek. xvi.13. My mother, the Holy Spirit.

On Ezek. xviii.7. And in the Gospel according to the Hebrews which the Nazarenes are accustomed to read, it is placed among the greatest sins 'if a man have grieved the spirit of his brother'.

Dialogue against Pelagius, iii.2. In the Gospel according to the Hebrews which is indeed in the Chaldaean and Syrian speech but is written in Hebrew letters, which the Nazarenes use to this day, called 'according to the apostles', or, as most term it, 'according to Matthew', which also is to be seen in the library of Caesarea, the story tells: Behold, the motehr of the Lord and his brethren said unto him: John Baptist baptizeth unto the remission of sins; let us go and be baptized of him. But he said unto them: Wherein (what) have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized of him? unless peradventure this very thing that I have said is a *sin of ignorance*.

ibid. And in the same book: If thy brother (saith he) have sinned by a word and made thee amends,

seven times in a day receive thou him. Simon his disciple said unto him: Seven times in a day? The Lord answered and said unto him: Yea, I say unto thee, unto seventy times seven times. For in the prophets also, after they were anointed by the Holy Spirit, the word of sin was found.

'Word of sin' is Hebraistic for 'somewhat of sin': similarly 'sinned by a word' means 'sinned in anything'.

Latin version of Origen on Matthew (now called Pseudo-Origen).

It is written in a certain Gospel which is called according to the Hebrews (if at least any one care to accept it, not as authoritative, but to throw light on the question before us):

The second of the rich men (*it saith*) said unto him: Master, what good thing can I do and live? He said unto him: O man, fulfil (do) the law and the prophets.

He answered him: I have *kept them*. He said unto him: Go, sell all that thou ownest, and distribute it unto the poor, and come, follow me. But the rich man began to scratch his head, and it pleased him not. And the Lord said unto him: How sayest thou: I have kept the law and the prophets? For it is written in the law: Though shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and lo, many of thy brethren, sons of Abraham, are clad in filth, dying for hunger, and thine house is full of many good things, and nought at all goeth out of it unto them.

And he turned and said unto Simon his disciple who was sitting by him: Simon, son of Joanna, it is easier for a camel to enter in by a needle's eye than for a rich man *to enter* into the kingdom of heaven.

It is probable that this extract was found by the translator of Origen's commentary in some work of Jerome. It seems to be agreed that it was not in Origen's own commentary.

Some manuscripts of the Gospels have marginal notes recording readings of 'the Jewish' Gospel, by which our Gospel is evidently meant. Some of these were published by Tischendorf, others more recently by Schmidtke. According to the latter these notes were originally made between 370 and 500 by some one who did his work at Jerusalem.

Matt. iv. 5. The Jewish *copy* has not 'unto the holy city' but 'in Jerusalem'.

Matt. v. 22. The word 'without cause' is not inserted in some copies, nor in the Jewish.

Matt. vii. 5. The Jewish has here: If ye be in my bosom and do not the will of my Father which is in heaven, out of my bosom will I scast you away.

(The 'Second Epistle of Clement', iv. 5, has: The Lord said: If ye be with me gathered together in my bosom and do not my commandments, I will cast you away and say unto you: Depart from me; I know you not whence ye are, ye workers of wickedness.)

Matt. x. 16. The Jewish *has* '(wise) more than serpents' instead of 'as serpents'.

Matt. xi. 12. (The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.) The Jewish has: 'is ravished (*or* plundered).'

Matt. xi. 25. (I thank thee (*lit.* confess unto thee), O Father.) The Jewish: 'I give thee thanks.'

Matt. xii. 40b. The Jewish has not: three days and three nights (in the heart of the earth).

Matt. xv. 5. The Jewish: Corban by which ye shall be profited by us.

Probably it is meant that the verse ran: But ye say to your father and mother: Corban, &c.

Matt. xvi. 2, 3. Omitted by 'the Jewish' (as by many extant manuscripts).

Matt. xvi. 17. The Jewish: (Simon) son of John.

Matt. xviii. 22. The Jewish has, immediately after the seventy times seven: For in the prophets, after they were anointed with the Holy Spirit, there was found in them a word (matter) of sin.

This shows the identity of 'the Jewish' with Jerome's gospel.

Matt. xxvi. 74. The Jewish: and he denied and swore and cursed.

Matt. xxvii. 65. The Jewish: And he delivered unto them armed men, that they might sit over against the cave and keep it day and night.

A commentary on Isaiah (liii.12) by Haimo of Auxerre (c. 850) has this apropos of the word 'Father forgive them':

For, as is contained in the Gospel of the Nazarenes, at this word of the Lord many thousands of Jews that stood round about the Cross believed.

A marginal note (thirteenth century) on a copy of the versified Bible called the Aurora (by Petrus de Riga), in a manuscript at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (one of a number of remarkable notes) is:

At the cleansing of the Temple:

In the books of the Gospels which the Nazarenes use it is read that rays issued from his eyes whereby they were terrified and put to flight.

Jerome *on Matt.* xxi. 12 says that the people whom Jesus drove out did not resist him: 'For a certain fiery and starry light shone (radiated) from his eyes and the majesty of the Godhead gleamed in his face.'

When I published the note, I took it that it was a reminiscence of Jerome's words: *ray* and *radiate* occur in both. But Dr. Zahn was of opinion that it might really represent something in the old Gospel: so I include it, though with hesitation.

One other mention of this Gospel has to be added.

In Budge's *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts* is a Discourse on Mary by Cyril of Jerusalem. Cyril (Pseudo-Cyril) relates that he had to send for a monk of Maioma of Gaza who was teaching false doctrine. Called on for an account of his belief the monk (p. 637, Eng. trans.) said: It is written in the *Gospel* to the Hebrews that when Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the good Father called a mighty power in the heavens which was called Michael, and committed Christ to the care thereof. And the power came down into the world and it was called Mary, and *Christ* was in her womb seven months. Afterwards she gave birth to him, and he increased in stature, and he chose the apostles, . . . 'was crucified, and taken up by the Father'. Cyril asked: Where in the Four Gospels is it said that the holy Virgin Mary the mother of god is a force? The monk said: In the *Gospel* to the Hebrews. Then, said Cyril, there are five Gospels? Where is the fifth? The monk said: It is *the Gospel* that was written to the Hebrews. (Cyril convinced him of his error and burned the books. No more is told of the Gospel, which, whatever it may have been, was certainly not the book we have been dealing with, but a writing of pronouncedly heretical (Docetic?) views. The last sentence of the monk's account of Christ, which I did not quote in full just now, is perhaps worth recording.) 'After they had raised him up on the cross, the Father took him up into heaven unto himself.' This, with its omission of all mention of the resurrection, might be construed as heretical: on the other hand, it may be merely a case of extreme compression of the narrative.